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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CROP CONDITIONS IN THE SOVIET BLOC, 1953

CIA/RR IM-379

23 September 1953

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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FOREWORD

The following memorandum on the condition of growing crops in the Soviet Bloc is the result of the analysis of information on weather and other factors affecting yield as of mid-July 1953. As a qualitative memorandum it reflects, in a general way, the prospects for the food supply of the Bloc for the consumption year 1 July 1953 through 30 June 1954. Quantitative estimates of production based on acreage as well as yield will be made in a later report. Until then, these general statements regarding conditions affecting crop development are indicative of the field crop potential of the Bloc as of mid-July 1953.

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(ORR Project 21.1.1)

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CROP CONDITIONS IN THE SOVIET BLOC, 1953

Summary

Crop production* in 1953 in the Soviet Bloc** as a whole is expected to be slightly less than in 1952. Production in the USSR and Communist China probably will be slightly below production in 1952, when a postwar high was attained in both countries. In the European Satellites, however, production is certain to be higher this year than in the relatively poor year of 1952. If current crop prospects are realized, the food situation (not including animal products) in the European Satellites should be appreciably relieved as compared with the previous year, although there undoubtedly still will be local shortages. It is estimated that in the USSR and Communist China the food situation will be slightly less favorable than in 1952, but the situation should not be critical on a nation-wide scale in either country barring large-scale grain exports to obtain desired consumer goods and industrial equipment.

I. USSR.

Based on weather and crop information as of mid-July 1953, crop prospects in the USSR as a whole indicate a 1953 production level slightly lower than the postwar-high level attained in 1952.

Normal to above-normal precipitation occurred in much of the USSR during the fall of 1952 and the winter of 1953, making possible an accumulation of relatively abundant reserves of soil moisture, as contrasted with a relatively dry fall in 1951. The

* Primary consideration is given to all grains, potatoes, and sugar beets.

** Including the USSR, Communist China, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Rumania.

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May and June precipitation in 1953, however, appears to have been less than in the same 2 months of 1952, and in some areas, particularly in June, the amounts were appreciably less.

Considering the effect of the more favorable reserves of soil moisture in 1953 and weighing this effect against the drier critical months of May and June in 1953 as compared with the corresponding period in 1952, it is believed that the average grain yield in the USSR in 1953 will be slightly less than the relatively high level attained in 1952.

Yields of potatoes and sugar beets will depend to a large extent on weather conditions in July and August, as will the extent of the grain-harvesting losses.

Considering the USSR on a regional basis, the Ukraine (Economic Region III)* had normal or above-normal precipitation during most of the fall of 1952 and winter of 1953, thus accumulating reserves of soil moisture. Grain seeded in the fall of 1952 for harvest in 1953 apparently survived the winter satisfactorily. Weather reports for May and June, however, indicate that precipitation in most of the Ukraine was less than in May and June of 1952 and below normal in much of the area. In view of the accumulated reserves of soil moisture it is believed that yields of winter grain will approximate the yields in 1952 but yields of spring grain probably will be less than in 1952 because of the drier May and June. Representatives of the American Embassy in Moscow on a trip through the Moldavian SSR have reported that the corn crop was near failure because of a lack of July rains. Other sources confirm low rainfall in this area in the same month.

In Central European USSR (Economic Region VII) the accumulated reserves of soil moisture probably were somewhat greater in 1953 than in 1952, but the May and June precipitation appears to have been considerably less than in 1952. Incomplete weather data for July 1953 indicate more nearly normal precipitation, which should have a beneficial effect on crop yields. Nevertheless, in view of the smaller amounts of precipitation in the critical months of May

* The term region in this memorandum refers to the economic regions defined and numbered in CIA Map 12048, 9-51, USSR: Economic Regions.

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and June, it is believed that yields of grain will be slightly less than in 1952. Representatives of the American Embassy in Moscow have reported some winter kill of winter grain in certain areas of the southern part of the region (Central Black Soil Zone).

In the Volga (Economic Region VI), yields of spring grain in 1953 probably will be slightly less than the relatively high yields of 1952, primarily because of less rainfall in May and June in 1953. Yields of winter grain may approximate those of 1952 as a result of favorable reserves of soil moisture.

In the Lower Don-North Caucasus (Economic Region IV), yields of grain in 1952 were exceptionally good, and on the basis of available current information it is believed that yields in 1953, although fair, will almost certainly not attain the high 1952 level. Reserves of soil moisture from the fall of 1952 and winter of 1953 appear to have been fairly adequate, but precipitation in May and June apparently was not sufficient to give yields at the high 1952 level. Agricultural officials of the American Embassy in Moscow traveled through the Kuban in mid-July and reported that the grain this year appeared to indicate lighter yields than in 1952. Corn prospects, however, were reported as good as or better than those of 1952.

The Baltic and Belorussia (Economic Regions IIa and IIb, respectively) are believed to have had generally below-average yields in 1952, and prospects for the 1953 crop do not appear to be much better. Yields probably will approximate those of last year.

In the Transcaucasus (Economic Region V), yields of grain may be slightly less than in 1952. Embassy travelers in July reported grain harvests were poor in the areas observed in Azerbaydzhan SSR, although, earlier in the season, winter grain crops in the Georgian SSR were reported to be in fair condition.

In the Urals and West Siberia (Economic Regions VIII and IX, respectively) and in the adjoining grain areas of Kazakh SSR (Economic Region Xa), crop conditions as of mid-July 1953 appeared somewhat more favorable than in 1952, when grain yields were below normal. Agricultural officials from the American Embassy in Moscow, on the basis of travel to Kurgan in West Siberia in late June, have reported that yield prospects for the 1953 harvest were generally good. Incomplete weather data for July 1953 indicate that precipitation was sufficient to make possible a better harvest than that of 1952.

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II. European Satellites.

On the basis of weather and crop information as of mid-July 1953, it is expected that the crop production of the European Satellites in 1953 will certainly exceed the 1952 production but will not attain the prewar or 1951 levels. Barring very unfavorable weather during the latter part of July and August, yields of spring-seeded grain, especially corn, are expected to show the most improvement over the yields achieved in 1952. Although yields of root crops are expected to be better than in 1952, insect infestations, a cold spring, and weeding difficulties may reduce yields below expectations.

The fall of 1952 was characterized by above-normal precipitation, delaying fall plowing and sowing but at the same time accumulating reserves of soil moisture. Conditions in the spring and early summer were better, on the whole, than in 1952, thus accounting for the improved crop prospects in 1953. Root crops were retarded throughout most of the area by a cold May, and warm weather in July, August, and September will be required to overcome early adverse effects of weather.

In order to simplify the regional presentation and to group countries having similar cropping systems, the European Satellites have been divided into two areas -- northern and southern. The northern area includes East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The southern area includes Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Albania.

A. Northern Area (East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia).

In the northern area of the European Satellites the fall of 1952 was characterized by above-normal precipitation, with the result that fall plowing and sowing of grains for harvest in 1953 were considerably hampered. Despite the fact that spring plowing and sowing were aided by favorable weather over most of the area, it is believed that the over-all acreage of bread grain will be less than prewar, because of failure to fulfill the fall sowing plans for winter wheat and rye.

Available weather information and reports from the American Embassy in Moscow indicate that cold and lack of rain characterized the spring in much of Poland, although more abundant rainfall appears to have occurred in June. Favorable conditions for spring work were reported in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Rainfall appears to have been generally adequate to abundant in the late spring and summer months, and in July heavy rains were reported to have caused harvesting difficulties for grain and cultivation difficulties for root and vegetable crops.

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It is expected that yields of grain will be slightly better than in 1952 but generally less than the prewar average. As for potatoes, sugar beets, and other vegetables, there have been reports of heavier insect infestations than in 1952. Yields of these crops will depend on the true extent of this infestation and on weather conditions in July, August, and September, available weather data for these months not as yet being complete.

B. Southern Area (Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Albania).

In the southern area of the European Satellites, precipitation in the fall of 1952 was considerably greater than in the fall of 1951. Albania reported over-fulfillment of the fall sowing plan, and Rumania and Bulgaria indicated at least near-fulfillment. Hungary, however, with considerably above-normal precipitation, failed substantially in fulfilling its fall sowing plan. To compensate for this deficiency in winter grain crops, Hungary set a goal for increased spring wheat acreage.

Spring weather favorable for plowing and sowing prevailed over most of the southern area of the European Satellites, but lags in field work were occasionally reported, in some cases as a result of seed shortages. Frost occurred in mid-May in Hungary, causing some damage to vines and fruit trees but apparently not affecting grains and vegetables.

Early summer rainfall appears to have been generally adequate, and in Hungary there were indications of excessive rainfall in some areas in June and July, causing lodging of grain and increasing harvesting difficulties. Wet weather and a certain amount of peasant apathy also have caused difficulties in the cultivation of root and vegetable crops in parts of Hungary. A lag in harvesting and threshing in some of the other major grain areas in the southern area of the European Satellites has been reported, which, if serious, would increase harvesting losses.

The yields of all crops in the southern area of the European Satellites will almost certainly be better than in 1952, but it is not anticipated that they will attain the prewar or 1951 levels.

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III. Communist China.

Available weather and crop information on Communist China and Manchuria for mid-July 1953 indicates an over-all crop production somewhat lower than the postwar high attained in 1952. Wheat production is almost certain to be less than in 1952, and it is believed that rice production also may be slightly less, although it is still too early to make a definite prediction on the rice crops to be harvested later this season.

The important wheat-producing provinces of Anhwei, Kiangsu, Shantung, Hopeh, Shansi, and Honan were reported to have been hit by heavy frosts (between 10 and 13 April), cold spells, insect pests, and hail storms. Much of the area was reported suffering from drought, which lasted until 20 June. The central portion of this area seems to have been affected most seriously. Conditions in Szechwan and Shensi, neighboring important wheat-growing provinces, appear to have been somewhat better. In the latter part of June, heavy rains were reported in Anhwei and Kiangsu, breaking the drought and causing some flooding.

In May and early June, heavy rainfall was reported in the South China provinces of Kwangtung, Hunan, Kiangsi, and Kwangsi. Based on reports from travelers in that area, the Consulate General in Hong Kong believes that the floods have been greater than normal in this important rice-growing area. Flooding appears to have been most serious in Kwangtung province in the double-cropping rice area, making it doubtful that the first rice crop of the year will be as large as in 1952. It is too early to indicate what the yields of rice in the single-cropping areas and the yields of the second crop of the year in the double-cropping area will be, since these depend to a considerable extent on weather conditions in the latter part of July, August, and September.

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SOURCES

1. Monthly Climatic Summaries (August 1952 - June 1953) from Air Weather Service, Andrews Field.
2. Telegrams and despatches from American Embassies in Soviet Bloc countries.
3. FBIS, daily and weekly publications.
4. FDD translations of Soviet Bloc agricultural newspapers.

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